

Thomas N. Gellert – The School Music News Editor



# Back to 'Our Future' and Persistence

**W**hat if someone told you that you have an opportunity for a "do-over" and a chance to re-invent, re-build and to make your program better than ever? You'd grab it, wouldn't you? Well, that moment may have finally arrived.

Friday the 13th March 2020 was more than just another Friday. It seems like an eternity has passed since the day when "the music stopped." It's all been a blur ever since, but that proverbial light at the end of the tunnel beckons as we start a very different and new school year. So, let's take a moment to ponder the future and how the time has never been better to get things off on the right foot.

### Challenges ahead

Transitioning "back" to life pre-pandemic will not be easy for everyone. Trepidation and uncertainty still remain as schools, parents and, more important, students return to life as we hope we once knew it. But, is it? Maybe, not. Reimagining a new path forward will require a good deal of reflection on how we can attempt to collectively recapture the success of our programs. In addition, we will not as some have stated, simply "flip a switch." Instead, we must work hard to reestablish and reintroduce music instruction to many kids who in some cases have been socially distanced from us and our programs for a very long time. We must try to fix what was broken and torn apart from our school music programs during the pandemic.

No doubt, this will take time and a whole lot of effort. That said, it is conceivably possible that along the way we can endeavor to rebuild our programs even stronger. How? Communication. I'm not talking about e-mail or "virtual" communication, either. I would venture to guess that "Back to School Night" this year will take on a whole new meaning. This is where you can start getting your message out to parents that we're back and that collectively, through our school music programs, kids will once again connect with school in a very positive way. This message must resonate throughout the year ahead!

Like sports almanacs where the use of an asterisk (\*) often denotes something out of the ordinary when placed ahead of a year or the name of an athlete, the second half of the 2019-20 school year and the entire 2020-21 school year will forever have that asterisk to denote that something out of the ordinary deeply impacted music education programs far and wide.

Normally I would generalize about all areas of education but here I make special note of the profound impact the pandemic had on school music programs across our

landscape. While some schools were able to salvage bits and pieces of their music programs, the majority of us witnessed a huge and unprecedented hit to our programs from the very start. Unfortunately, the effects of the pandemic only got worse over time before we started to see some attempt to reverse course.

### Reestablishing connections

As the 2021-22 school year has now begun, we face numerous challenges ahead to try to retake lost ground. Much of what we need to do is to focus on reestablishing the foundation of our school music programs. There are at least several years of youngsters who were, unfortunately, almost instantly disconnected from beginning music instruction, be it classroom, vocal and/or instrumental-based. There is uncertainty as to whether or not these students can be reclaimed. There is also the challenge of connecting with other youngsters who are just now at the start of their school music experience. We will need to embrace these students and also to rebuild the trust of their parents that music education is back and open for business.

Finally, the opportunity to reconnect with students already in your program when the events of March 13, 2020, came to pass awaits. For many it will be an uphill climb and there will undoubtedly be obstacles in place that we must navigate together. However, the creative spirit of music educators is never in short supply, especially now!

We have the ability to reshape and rebuild our programs even stronger than they were before. That said, we are all engaged in this effort. Know that you are in good company but also know that your ingenuity, willingness to explore options that you may not know that you have until you try something new, and your perseverance during monumental difficult times can "tip the scales" in your favor.

Looking ahead to the school year to come here is one of my favorite quotes from our 30th President, Calvin Coolidge (1923-29):

*"Nothing in this world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful men [or women] with talent. Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent. The slogan "Press On!" has solved and always will solve the problems of the human race."*

Hang in there, make every day count and don't give up! You made it through the past 18 months. The future is yours to shape! Have a great year! ||